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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 001005

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TAGS: PREL RS KS KN

SUBJECT: GOR RATCHETS UP PRESSURE ON NORTH KOREA WITH A FM LAVROV VISIT

REF: A. MOSCOW 659
 1B. MOSCOW 890

Classified By: Acting DCM Alice Wells for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) In the wake of North Korea's announced withdrawal from the Six Party Talks and the expulsion of inspectors in response to the UN Security Council's censure of its April 5 missile launch, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will visit Pyongyang April 23-24 with a stop over in Seoul afterwards. Although the trip has long been planned as a return visit to North Korean Foreign Minister Pak Ui Chun's October, 2008 trip to Moscow, its timing provides the GOR with a rare chance to demonstrate publicly its relevance on Northeast Asian security issues.

Six Party Talks a Paramount Importance

¶2. (C) According to our Japanese contacts, Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksey Borodavkin indicated to the Japanese Ambassador during an April 20 meeting that Lavrov, in line with the GOR's oft-repeated public stance on the paramount importance of the Six Party process, will urge North Korea to resume the talks and refrain from restarting its nuclear program. The visit follows more private MFA overtures to the North Koreans in the wake of the missile test, through DFM Borodavkin and Ambassador-at-Large for Six Party Talks Logvinov, appealing for North Korean restraint from "more surprises" and for the resumption of the talks.

¶3. (C) As reported in Ref A, the GOR has been walking a fine line on the North Korea missile launch issue, balancing its interest in stability on a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula with its historical ties with DPRK that have allowed Moscow a voice in Northeast Asian security matters. In the aftermath of the latest Pyongyang-manufactured crisis, maintaining the viability of the Six Party Talks has become the MFA's priority. The continuation of the talks, in Moscow's view, would help push the status of the Yongbyon nuclear facilities beyond disablement to irreversible shutdown, while the accompanying economic assistance would help prevent a potential regime collapse that could have catastrophic crossborder consequences. It would also allow Russia a voice in any new Northeast Asia security structure that might arise as a result of North Korea's denuclearization.

Worry about Strong UNSC Action

¶4. (C) The GOR therefore has been particularly worried about the consequences of strong UN Security Council action against the North Korean missile launch, a concern that, in its view, has been borne out with the latest DPRK response.

As Logvinov conveyed to Senate Foreign Relations Committee Senior Staffer Frank Jannuzi last week, some MFA officials, including him, privately believe that Pyongyang was looking for an excuse to cause a collapse of the Six Party Talks because the leadership believed it had gotten all it could from the process without irreversibly giving up the nuclear program (N.B. First Asia Department Senior Counselor Igor Sagitov voiced a similar view in Ref B). In his view, expanding the 1718 sanctions would not only play into the DPRK's hands, it would also allow the regime to invoke the specter of a hostile international community bent on punishing North Korea for its "glorious technological achievements" to justify devoting more resources to its military programs and asking its people for more sacrifices despite the country's already dire economic circumstances. In addition, continued Security Council action against North Korea would only drive up the price Pyongyang would extract for eventual negotiations on giving up its missile program.

Comment

¶5. (C) MFA officials tell us that besides ensuring the continued viability of the Six Party Talks, another top GOR goal is to prevent North Korea from "doing any more stupid things." After reluctantly supporting the UNSC Presidential Statement in the interest of P5 and Six Party unity, the MFA may be worried that North Korea could escalate the situation further in response to the designation of entities and goods related to Pyongyang's WMD and missile programs called for in the PRST. Foreign Minister Lavrov's trip to Pyongyang this

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week therefore may be Moscow's way to manage the potential fallout.

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